

Professional Development

Sabbaticals for Counselor Educators: Purposes, Benefits, and Outcomes

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The authors investigated the purposes, benefits, and outcomes of sabbaticals for counselor educators. Forty-five counselor educators who had taken sabbaticals within the previous 5 years completed an on-line survey about aspects of their sabbatical leave. Sabbaticals were overwhelmingly reported to be positive and productive experiences that yielded personal and professional benefits.

One aspect of working in academia, particularly for faculty members, has been the opportunity to take a sabbatical leave every few years. The concept of the sabbatical has its roots in the Old Testament prescription for a sabbatical year (or year of rest) every 7th year; the word *sabbatical* derives from the Hebrew *Shenath shabbathon* or year of rest (Bechtel, 1912). Sabbaticals were first introduced at Harvard in 1880 (Miller & Kang, 1997) and since then have become an integral part of higher education in the United States. A 1982 study by Anderson and Atelsek found that these types of leaves were offered by nearly all U.S. universities, more than 80% of 4-year colleges, and 60% of 2-year colleges. Despite the long tradition of sabbaticals in academia, studies on sabbatical leaves have been limited, with most refereed publications appearing in the higher education literature. Because very few studies of sabbaticals exist and because of the lack of attention to this topic in counselor education, we decided to investigate the purposes, benefits, and outcomes of sabbaticals, using a national sample of counselor educators.

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In higher education, sabbaticals are commonly defined as "paid leaves of absence for a faculty member . . . for personal and professional improvement or development . . . [typically lasting] either a half-year with full compensation or a full academic year with somewhat reduced compensation" (Miller & Kang, 1997, p. 11). Viewing the sabbatical from its historical origins, Sima and Denton (1995) concluded that increasing scholarly productivity has been the primary purpose of sabbaticals. More recently, the definition of sabbatical has been broadened to include opportunities for "personal and professional development with the assumption that the value of the faculty member will be enhanced through the experience" (Sima & Denton, 1995, p. 8). Thus, sabbaticals serve as a reward for faculty members who have accomplished tenure and given good service to the university as well as a way to create incentive, motivate, energize, and improve faculty performance (Baldwin & Krotseng, 1985).

Sabbaticals are one type of released time provided to faculty members to relieve them of specific responsibilities so that they can concentrate time and energies in one or more areas, typically in the categories of scholarship, teaching, or service. A unique feature of sabbaticals is that they usually are characterized by a complete disengagement from regular university responsibilities. The term *research leave* may also be used to describe experiences (typically research focused) similar to sabbaticals. For our study, research leave and sabbatical leave were considered to be essentially the same.

Although sabbatical leaves most often are described in terms of benefits to faculty members, eligibility requirements for sabbatical leaves are determined by universities and colleges. An administrative definition of a sabbatical includes a leave of absence with full or partial compensation following a specific minimum number of years of consecutive service at one institution (Good, 1959). University policies typically require formal application and approval for the sabbatical, at least 1 year of service at the institution following the sabbatical, and a report on sabbatical accomplishments (Zahorski, 1994).

The rationale for the need for sabbatical leaves as an important part of academic life is stated well in the sabbatical leave policy of the University of New Brunswick (n.d.), Canada: "[because] faculty members are required to continue to develop as scholars, researchers, and professionals throughout their careers, a system of sabbatical leaves shall be maintained" (Article 31a). Baldwin and Krotseng (1985) also discussed the need for institutions to effectively support the performance and renewal of their faculty members. Thus, sabbaticals in higher education are offered not only to increase scholarly productivity but also in recognition of the institution's

responsibility for helping members balance the complex demands, responsibilities, and expectations of academic life (Gordon, 1986).

Although most faculty and many administrators understand the role of sabbaticals in academic life, those outside the academy (e.g., legislators) may be much more skeptical. For example, controversy over a sabbatical leave granted to a senior administrator at a University of Colorado campus (Lively, 1994) led to the introduction of a bill in the Colorado General Assembly to institute stricter requirements and oversight for sabbaticals. On the other hand, there has been increased interest during the last few years in the sabbatical's potential merits by organizations outside of academia, such as public schools, business, and even medicine. Sample titles of recent articles published in business journals and newsletters (e.g., "Time for a Sabbatical," "Sabbaticals: Benefit for the 90s," "Sabbaticals Gain Popularity," "Why Sabbaticals Make Sense") clearly indicate interest in sabbaticals for nonacademic organizations and their employees. Articles on sabbaticals have also been published in such journals as the *Journal of Accountancy*, *British Medical Journal*, *Family Practice Management*, *Journal of Academic Librarianship*, *Bioscience*, and the *Journal of Education for Business*.

What, then, are the benefits of sabbaticals? Boening and Miller (1997) contended that sabbaticals were an essential part of any faculty development program and that "those who took sabbatical leaves overwhelmingly reported the experience as a positive one" (p.12). Cook (1994) identified several benefits of sabbaticals, including burnout prevention; increased job satisfaction; personal and professional growth and rejuvenation; and time for focusing on and developing teaching, research, or service without normal interruptions and responsibilities. Zahorski (1994) also cited several ways in which sabbaticals could benefit faculty members, for example, new perspectives and attitudes, improved mental and physical health, increased energy and enthusiasm for career, and scholarly/creative products (e.g., books, articles, research studies, musical or artistic compositions). Avakian (1987) cited institutional benefits that included improved faculty morale, increased scholarly output, and improved teaching.

Several research studies have questioned the benefits of sabbatical leaves. Miller and Kang (1997) critically examined sabbatical outcomes of 151 faculty members at one large southern university over a 5-year period. They found that although respondents claimed improved teaching performance (68%) and increased scholarly productivity (85%), most (60%) reported that they did not believe they were better "academic citizens" as a result of taking a sabbatical. These researchers concluded, however, that objective data did not

support faculty perceptions of improved teaching and scholarship and noted the challenges in objectively assessing results of sabbaticals. Boice (1987) also questioned the effectiveness of released time, citing a lack of substantial evidence to support its effectiveness, the relevance of how members use their released time, the negative message that released time may convey about teaching (e.g., rarely are scholarship expectations reduced to allow faculty to focus more on teaching), and questions about whether faculty who would most benefit from released time are the ones who actually receive it. In a series of studies of faculty workloads and released time, Boice concluded that (a) unproductive professors remained unproductive, regardless of workload or released time, and (b) "without clear goals and supports for using released time, [granting sabbaticals] does not seem likely to achieve its ideals" (p. 324).

What do faculty members do on their sabbaticals? In a review of sabbatical applications from 193 members over a 3-year period, Sima and Denton (1995) identified eight categories of anticipated and actual sabbatical activities:

- (1) to learn a new research technique; (2) to develop research; (3) to conduct research; (4) to study; (5) to write a book, monograph, or journal articles; (6) to conduct reviews, design procedures, or to create art work; (7) to develop courses or curricula; (8) to present research to colleagues. (p. 10)

They found that most faculty intended to use their sabbatical for research (49%) or writing (21%). Products of these sabbaticals included books or manuscripts, book chapters or monographs, journal articles published or submitted for review, research grants, presentations and invited lectures, and course development. The authors noted that faculty members tended to be satisfied with their productivity during sabbaticals and appreciative of the time to focus on scholarship, grants, or both.

Because faculty from different disciplines may require different kinds of sabbatical experiences, our descriptive study was designed to identify and describe the purposes, benefits, and outcomes of sabbaticals for counselor educators. A review of the literature revealed no previous studies or articles on the topic of counselor educator sabbaticals. In the following, we describe our qualitative methodology, summarize findings, and present recommendations for counselor educators who are considering taking a sabbatical.

Method

Procedure

Departmental liaisons from 138 counselor education programs that were accredited by the Council for Accreditation of Counsel-

ing and Related Educational Programs (CACREP) were contacted by e-mail and asked to identify counselor educators in their programs who had taken a sabbatical or research leave in the past 5 years. One hundred eight (78%) liaisons responded to the initial inquiry, and 85 faculty members who met criteria for the study were identified. These individuals were then contacted by e-mail and invited to participate in an online survey about their sabbatical experiences. Of this initial group of 85 counselor educators, 49 (58%) agreed to participate. We sent e-mails to the faculty members who had agreed to participate in the study, asking them to complete the survey at a designated Web site. A total of 45 surveys were returned (92% return rate). We conducted this study primarily using the Internet, with e-mail as the medium of communication. Most respondents (93%) completed their surveys online, and their responses were transmitted electronically to the researchers. Only 7% of participants chose to print a copy of the survey, complete it by hand, and mail it.

Participants

Participants were solicited from counselor educators in CACREP-approved programs. The sample consisted of 45 counselor educators who had taken sabbaticals within the previous 5 years and who responded to e-mail invitations to participate in the study. Participants included 32 men and 13 women, most of whom were between 41 and 60 years old. All participants had earned doctorates and had been counselor educators for a mean of 20 years. Participants included 23 full professors (51%) and 22 associate professors (49%). Most (76%) had taken one-semester sabbaticals; 18% had taken academic- or calendar-year leaves, and 6% had taken leaves based on the quarter system. All respondents reported that they received funding for their sabbaticals, with most (87%) being funded at full salary by their institutions. About one third (36%) of the respondents had taken one or more sabbaticals previously; for most (64%), however, this sabbatical was their first. To encourage honest, confidential participant responses, no additional identifying information was collected about participants or their institutions.

Instrument

We developed the survey instrument to gather data about the characteristics of participants and their sabbatical experiences. Demographic data questions (e.g., gender, faculty rank, length of sabbatical) were included for purposes of describing study participants. In

addition to demographic data, the survey instrument also included several open-ended, short-answer questions, which were based on the existing literature on the purposes, benefits, and outcomes of sabbaticals. These questions included the following:

- What were the perceived personal and professional benefits of *your* sabbatical?
- How long did the benefits you listed above last after returning from *your* sabbatical?
- What are the professional and personal benefits of sabbaticals (in general)?
- What are the benefits to colleges/universities of faculty sabbaticals (in general)?
- What was the most beneficial thing about *your* sabbatical leave?
- If you could take the same sabbatical leave again, what would you do differently?
- What recommendations would you make to counselor educators considering sabbaticals?

To fully understand the experiences of our sample of counselor educators, we preferred using open-ended questions. Because of the limited amount of research in this area and the total absence of any study of counselor educators and their sabbatical experiences, we wanted to allow participants maximum flexibility and opportunity to define and describe their own experiences without limitations of predetermined response sets (e.g., Likert scales). Although not as succinct or standardized as closed questions, "the narrative comments from open-ended questions typically are meant to provide a forum for elaborations, explanations, meanings, and new ideas" (Patton, 1987, p. 11).

Data Analysis

Demographic data received via the Internet were electronically tabulated upon receipt. Copies of responses to open-ended questions were made and distributed to each member of the research team (the two authors and their research assistants). The two authors were tenured male counselor educators at CACREP-accredited programs, one with 15 years and the other with 9 years of experience as counselor educators and both with extensive experience as counseling practitioners. Because neither of us had yet taken a sabbatical, we undertook this research with no experiences that would bias our expectations, item development, or understanding of participant responses. Both research assistants were female graduate students in counseling (one master's-level

student, one M.S./Ph.D. student) who were extensively involved in all aspects of this research study, including literature review and development and administration of the survey.

We used inductive analysis to identify themes and develop descriptive labels for inductively generated categories (Patton, 1987). Because of our interest in exploring and understanding individual experiences and outcomes of faculty sabbaticals, we determined that qualitative analysis of responses to the open-ended survey questions was the most appropriate approach (cf. Patton, 1987, p. 48). The goal of this analysis was not to interpret or "read into" responses but to describe and classify responses into cohesive categories that would shed light on the purposes, characteristics, outcomes, and benefits of the sabbatical experience for counselor educators. Categories were judged by the criteria of internal homogeneity (the qualitative equivalent of internal consistency) and external heterogeneity (existence of distinct and clear differences between categories; Guba, 1978). Triangulation was accomplished by having each member of the research team independently review and categorize responses to each question prior to any discussions or comparisons with other research team members.

After independent review, each researcher-research assistant pair (located at different universities) met to compare and discuss response categories and items contained in each category. Steps in this process were to (a) gain consensus on categories for each question; (b) classify (sort) responses into each category; and (c) modify categories as needed, including descriptive labels for each. For example, categories sometimes were collapsed from multiple categories to a single category; similarly, discussion among members of the research team might result in one category being divided into two smaller, more specific categories. The goal of this procedure was to obtain agreement (consensus) between each pair of raters on the best schema for understanding responses from participants. This process was then repeated by having the two faculty researchers compare and discuss results of each researcher-research assistant pair until clear, integrated regularities emerged (Patton, 1987), bringing closure to the process. In many ways, this process is the qualitative equivalent of a factor analysis, with the goal of organizing data into internally consistent categories.

Results

In responding to the open-ended questions, participants could (and frequently did) provide multiple responses. Each of the eight open-ended questions in the survey required respondents to provide short, narrative responses. The most common purposes reported for taking

a sabbatical were to develop or conduct research projects (56%), skills development (49%), writing journal articles (42%) or books (36%), and dealing with burnout (35%). Opportunity for travel also was cited (22%) as a reason for taking sabbaticals by numerous participants. The most commonly noted products of sabbaticals were manuscripts (56%), completed research (44%), and books (27%), with various other products (e.g., grants) mentioned less frequently.

General benefits of sabbaticals included scholarly activities (e.g., writing and conducting research; 64%), stress management (31%), and time to update skills and knowledge (22%). Benefits such as increased professional enthusiasm, networking opportunities, and time for reflection were mentioned less frequently. For the majority of respondents (58%), the benefits of their sabbaticals were ongoing, whereas for others, the benefits lasted a moderate (24%) or short (24%) period of time. Several questions asked respondents to provide more specific information about personal, professional, and institutional benefits of sabbaticals. Responses to these questions can be found in Table 1.

TABLE 1
Summary of Sabbatical Benefits

Aspect of Sabbatical	% of Responses
Personal benefits	
Self-care/rejuvenation	33
Self-exploration/centering	24
Opportunity to travel	16
Creativity/exploring new ideas	13
Time to focus on own interests	13
More time with family and friends	13
Respite from university	13
Professional benefits	
Productivity/scholarship	62
Professional/skills development	31
Professional renewal	27
Integrating new perspectives into teaching	13
Networking with colleagues	11
Most beneficial aspects	
Opportunity to work on scholarly projects	47
Time for personal renewal	22
Opportunity for networking	16
Time for rest and relaxation	16
Professional renewal	11
Benefits to institutions	
More motivated employees	51
Increased faculty productivity	38
New perspectives, skills, knowledge	24
Increased prestige/publicity for institution	24
Improved teaching/benefits to students	20

Note. Respondents frequently gave multiple responses to each question. Responses given by fewer than 10% of respondents were not reported.

Question 6 asked, "If you could take the same sabbatical again, what would you do differently?" Many respondents (36%) indicated that they would do nothing differently, whereas 18% indicated that they would take more time for their sabbatical (e.g., a full academic year rather than only one semester). Others mentioned the need for more advance planning and structuring of their sabbatical, including staying away from campus, doing more traveling, and incorporating clinical experiences. Respondents had many recommendations for other counselor educators considering taking a sabbatical. The most frequent recommendations were "take one, don't wait" (29%); plan carefully and schedule early (24%); have clearly defined goals for the sabbatical (24%); and include a plan for personal renewal (20%) as part of the sabbatical. Other recommendations included take a sabbatical as often as possible, stay away from the office, consult with others who have taken sabbaticals previously, include time for family and exploration in the sabbatical, and seek funding. Several interesting recommendations received only a single mention: write a book, maintain contact with colleagues about sabbatical activities, collect data in advance (so that sabbatical time can be spent analyzing and writing), and be careful to use the sabbatical to meet your needs and "build in" spare time for yourself.

Discussion

Although sabbaticals have long been an integral part of academic life, they have received relatively little research attention. Moreover, this study is the first to examine the nature of the sabbatical experience for a national sample of counselor educators. Results of this study suggest that, in many ways, the counselor educators in this study are not unlike other higher education faculty members in terms of the purposes, activities, benefits, and outcomes of their sabbatical leaves. This is not particularly surprising because institutional requirements for sabbaticals are general by nature and must fit the varying needs of faculty members across many disciplines (Anderson & Atelsek, 1982; Miller & Kang, 1997). However, results indicated some differences that may be unique to counselor educators in general and may reflect the values, attitudes, beliefs, and work characteristic of the counseling profession.

Counselor educators in this study, like most faculty members, reported professional growth and productivity (research projects, writing) and improving morale (addressing burnout) as major reasons for taking sabbaticals. Skill development, however, which was reported as important by 49% of respondents (second only to research projects, 56%), was mentioned specifically in the litera-

ture by only one author (Cook, 1994) who was, interestingly, an educator at the K-12 level. This suggests that counselor educators in this study may consider the opportunity to develop and maintain professional skills as an essential part of their own professional development and something that is difficult to achieve in the context of their normal faculty duties. This finding also seems consistent with Dayhaw-Barker's (1994) observation that professional schools have a particular obligation to provide students with "well-credentialed faculty who are at the forefront of their respective disciplines" (p. 23) and who, presumably, keep themselves up-to-date with changes in their professions. The role of providing clinical supervision for counselors-in-training also requires counselor educators to have a high level of current knowledge and skill in clinical and supervision areas. Skill development was mentioned second only to research projects, thus reflecting positively on the efforts of counselor educators to remain current in professional knowledge and practice.

In addition to scholarly accomplishments, improved instruction, and skill development, a key purpose of sabbaticals reported by many professors has been to "recharge their batteries and avoid burnout" (Lewis, 1997, p. 14). Although consistent with other studies reporting overall benefits in personal and professional growth and rejuvenation, counselor educators in this study also placed high priorities on self-exploration, travel, more time with family and friends, networking and exchanging ideas, and collegial relationships. These differences seem to reflect values inherent in the counseling profession. Similar to findings in other studies, participants strongly valued the respite from normal job responsibilities and university service work that occurs during the sabbatical; however, spending part of this time on developing and renewing professional and personal relationships seemed to be of particular importance.

As in other studies, participants ranked research-related benefits as the most important aspect of their own sabbaticals. This finding is certainly consistent with university policies and expectations for sabbaticals. However, counselor educators in our study ranked stress management and personal renewal in second place. This suggests not only the importance that participants placed on their own mental health (particularly appropriate for counselor educators) but also that personal renewal and stress management should be considered by faculty and incorporated into institutional policies as valid primary benefits of sabbaticals.

The sabbatical is a way for institutions to support the performance and renewal of their faculty members (Baldwin & Krotseng, 1985) and, in return, reap the benefits of faculty accomplishments and rejuvenation following sabbatical leave. Counselor educators

overwhelmingly reported that colleges and universities benefited from more motivated and productive faculty members following sabbaticals. Although some studies (e.g., Miller & Kang, 1997) have failed to find support for claims from faculty members of increased scholarly productivity and improved teaching after sabbaticals, counselor educators in our study also reported that their productivity increased and their teaching improved as a result of taking a sabbatical. Moreover, participants believed that their institutions accrued prestige, status, and desirable publicity because of faculty activities, accomplishments, and recognition during sabbaticals. These results should be of interest to administrators as well as faculty and help to support the contributions of sabbaticals to the mission and quality of the university. Results of this study suggest that counselor educators may return from sabbaticals with increased motivation that may result in better institutional citizenship. This differs from the findings of Miller and Kang who reported that almost 60% of their respondents indicated they did not believe they were better "academic citizens" after taking sabbaticals.

Counselor educators listed a number of specific products of sabbaticals, including manuscripts, completed research, books, grant completion, grant development, and book proposals. This list corresponded closely with other studies and with university guidelines regarding the purposes of sabbaticals. Many respondents indicated that their sabbaticals also positively contributed to their teaching and related work with students because of opportunities to further develop their knowledge and skills in course-related areas. In addition, participants reported renewed energy and enthusiasm for their work when they returned from sabbatical. Although scholarly accomplishments were cited as the most beneficial aspect of their sabbaticals by almost half of the respondents, many also noted personal and professional renewal, networking and travel, and time for rest and reflection as significant benefits. Counselor educators in our study reported that the greatest personal benefits of sabbaticals were time to take care of themselves, reflect, and pursue their own interests; opportunities to develop and enjoy relationships with friends, family, and colleagues; and respite from the stresses and strains of university life. It is interesting that most participants (58%) believed that the benefits of their sabbaticals were ongoing; another 24% reported that benefits of their sabbaticals lasted up to 2 years after they returned to their university.

When asked what they would do differently with their sabbaticals, more than one third of respondents indicated "nothing." Others responded that they would extend the length of the sabbatical, do

more planning and structuring prior to taking the sabbatical, or do more traveling. In general, respondents were very enthusiastic about recommending sabbaticals to their colleagues. In addition to "take one," the most common recommendations were related to planning and structuring sabbatical time, activities, and goals both in the personal and professional areas of life. The emergence of structuring and planning sabbaticals as a key theme in our study supports other literature (e.g., Scott, 1992) that has emphasized the need for careful planning regarding all aspects of the sabbatical leave, including travel and financial considerations.

It is important to note limitations of these findings. Because we relied on participants' self-reports in response to open-ended questions, responses were necessarily subjective and might not have completely reflected the benefits and products of sabbaticals. Despite a very high return rate (92%), the total number of respondents was only 45; thus, their responses might not be representative of all counselor educators. Finally, although we made every effort to ensure evaluator neutrality, "all statistical data are based on someone's definition of what to measure and how to measure it" (Patton, 1987, p. 166).

Conclusion

Results of this study suggest that the purposes, activities, benefits, and outcomes of sabbaticals for counselor educators are similar in many ways to those of other faculty members who have taken sabbaticals. Counselor educators, however, may differ from faculty members in other disciplines in ways that reflect their roots in the counseling profession. Participants in this study seemed to place a higher priority on personal and social development (including personal renewal, time for family and friends, and networking with colleagues) than reported by noncounseling faculty. In addition, these counselor educators considered skill development to be one important purpose of sabbaticals and perceived themselves as more motivated, more enthusiastic, and better institutional citizens after the sabbatical. Counselor educators in this study also reported institutional benefits that are not found in the general literature, including positive publicity, increased prestige, and enhanced status.

Responses of counselor educators we surveyed seemed to reflect the values and beliefs of the counseling profession and to intentionally incorporate "strategies that address wellness, personal growth, or career development" (American Counseling Association, 2000). What is needed now is for counselor educators to advocate for the importance of including wellness, personal growth, and

career development, along with scholarly productivity, as valid reasons for taking sabbaticals and as valuable benefits for both faculty members and their institutions. Researchers should conduct further studies to determine specific outcomes of sabbatical leaves in the areas of wellness, personal growth, and professional development. In addition, a continuing challenge is to document sabbatical accomplishments in ways that are meaningful to and valued by administrators. Finally, future research should examine how faculty members actually spend their time during sabbaticals as well as the views and concerns that administrators have about sabbatical leaves.

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